



Labor & Public Employees Committee

S.B. No. 63 An Act Mandating Employers Provide Sick Leave to Employees

Submitted by Amy Miller, Program & Public Policy Director

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Good afternoon. My name is Amy Miller and I am the Program & Public Policy Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives.

For 37 years, CWEALF has worked to advance women's opportunities. We firmly believe that women should have access to benefits which ensure they can properly care for themselves as well as their families while being productive employees. Therefore, I am here today to testify on *Raised Bill No. 63 An Act Mandating Employers Provide Sick Leave to Employees*.

Information gathered from the Institute for Women's Policy Research, shows that more than 22 million working women lack basic sick day benefits.¹

- 47 percent of women working in the private sector have no paid sick days.
- In the industries that employ the most women – retail trade and accommodations/food service – 55% and 78% of workers are without paid sick days. In those two industries alone, almost 9 million women lack paid sick days.
- 27% of low-income women (with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level) put off getting medical attention because they cannot take time off from work.
- 57% of women workers in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women are without paid sick days.

In *Paid Sick Days Legislation, A Legislator's Guide*, the Center for Law and Social Policy and the Women Legislators' Lobby makes practical recommendations on how to provide access to paid sick days and how workers can accrue paid sick time. For example, for every 30 hours worked, a worker could earn one hour of paid sick leave up to an established maximum. This way, workers still have access to paid hours regardless of full-time or part-time status, but full-time workers acquire more simply because they work more hours.² The Guide provides various recommendations for solutions, tailored according to the size of the business and the definition of the worker. Ultimately, there are practical solutions for a problem facing too many workers in Connecticut.

¹ *Women and Paid Sick Days: Crucial for Family Well-Being*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, February 2007.

² *Paid Sick Days Legislation: A Legislator's Guide*, Center for Law and Social Policy and the Women Legislators' Lobby, November 2006.

Supporting paid sick days makes good business sense. A healthy workforce increases productivity and this will benefit the state's economy in the long term.³ People who are sick can recuperate faster at home, should be able to see a physician, and are less likely to infect other workers. In one study, 44% of corporate human resource executives say that 'presenteeism' (employees coming to work when they are ill) is a problem for their companies.⁴

Ensuring provision of paid sick leave is about equity. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 72% of low-wage workers in the private sector have no paid sick leave, as opposed to 44% earning over \$15/hour.⁵ Without sick day benefits, employees go to work when they are sick because they simply cannot afford to miss days at work. On average, workers only need about a week of sick leave each year to take care of their own health needs; but for the thousands of Connecticut residents living paycheck-to-paycheck, missing one day of work can mean missing the rent or mortgage for the month. And those who are most likely to live paycheck-to-paycheck are also those who are less likely to have sick leave benefits.

Supporting paid sick days also makes good sense in terms of public health and well-being. A widely-publicized study conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research analyzed the effects of the recent H1N1 pandemic.⁶ Unsurprisingly, people went to work even when they knew they were sick and the study estimates that 7 million people contracted H1N1 from infected coworkers. The study also shows that there was a clear correlation between the lack of paid sick days and increased spread of the H1N1 virus, which effected thousands of Connecticut residents and required the purchase of over a million vaccination doses.

Throughout our history, CWEALF has advocated on behalf of federal and state family and medical leave laws. The Family and Medical Leave Act is important to ensure people can keep their jobs while caring for themselves or a family member but that Act does not ensure paid time off **AND** the FMLA covers only employers with 50 or more employees. According to the 2000 Census, 94% of all Connecticut businesses had less than 50 employees. That leaves employees in only 6% of Connecticut businesses qualifying for **unpaid** time off under federal law.

CWEALF is one of these small businesses. We believe that providing paid sick leave is critical to both our individual workers and to our agency as a whole. Without this benefit, we would experience great difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified employees. In addition, because our staff is not eligible for FMLA, we allow staff to accumulate sick days to build a pool for use as a short term disability policy in the event of serious illness. We should not be alone in providing these benefits.

Connecticut should take this important step in the ensuring the families have some protection when they need to take time off for an illness. I urge you to support Raised Bill 63 –having paid sick days will give the women in Connecticut an opportunity to remain healthy, productive workers.

³ *Issue Brief: Health and Productivity Among U.S. Workers*, Karen Davis, et. al., The Commonwealth Fund Publication, August 2005.

⁴ CCH Incorporated, *2003 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey*, October 2003, <http://www.cch.com/press/news/2003/200321022h.asp>.

⁵ *National Compensation Survey: employee Benefits in Private Industry in the United States*, March 2007, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0006.pdf>.

⁶ *Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic (Briefing Paper)*, R. Drago and K. Miller, Institute for Women's Policy Research, February 2010, available at <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B284sickatwork.pdf>.